



Public Hearing – March 13, 2017
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert Klee

Senate Bill No. 995 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE REDUCTION OF CERTAIN LAND-BASED MARINE AND FRESHWATER DEBRIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding SB 995. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following testimony.

We support reducing waste in the marine and freshwater environment, because such debris harms aquatic species, birds, and other wildlife. However, we have concerns about two of the sections of this bill.

Section 8 of the bill would prohibit state park visitors from bringing in or using disposable utensils for any meals or gatherings in state parks. Large group gatherings such as birthday parties are common in our parks. Requiring these groups to purchase and bring silverware for all members of the party is not practical in most cases, and will likely result in significant non-compliance with the prohibition. This section also prohibits food concessionaires on state park property from providing disposable utensils or straws to customers. State Park food concession buildings do not contain mechanized dish washing equipment, which would have to be added in order for concessionaires to provide silverware to customers. The penalty provision is also of concern, as it would require that records be kept to ascertain which park goers received a warning prior to issuing a fine for a subsequent violation. A ban on disposable utensils could also lead to more non-disposable utensils being thrown in the park's garbage containers.

Section 10 is well intended, but is also of concern. It is true that lost, abandoned, or discarded fishing gear, especially various traps and pots, can cause undesirable mortality of fish and other resources. Lobster and fish pots are prime examples. There are gear-marking laws in effect that would help establish ownership of some type of fishing gear, but in practical terms, it can be difficult to differentiate illegally abandoned or discarded gear from inadvertently lost gear. Intent would be difficult to establish in most cases unless an overt act of dumping was observed. The Department is, however, in favor of penalties for abandoned lobster pots if either the current or previous year's lobster trap tag is not affixed as required by law. The last sentence of section 10 provides an exception for unused or abandoned commercial fishing gear in the waters of the state for the purpose of providing habitat and growth structures for marine life. The Department does not condone this type of activity in Connecticut waters.

We would be happy to work with the proponents of this legislation to help develop alternative language.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Lee Sawyer, DEEP's legislative liaison, at 860.424.3332 or lee.sawyer@ct.gov.